Iraq says it will prosecute IS detainees sent from Syria

BAGHDAD: Iraq's Supreme Judicial Council said on Thursday it would begin legal proceedings against detainees of the militant Islamic State group transferred from Syria, after the rapid collapse of Kurdish-led forces in northeast Syria triggered concerns over prison security.

More than 10,000 members of the ultra-hardline militant group have been held for years in about a dozen prisons and detention camps guarded by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria's northeast.

The US military said on Tuesday its forces had transferred 150 IS detainees from Syria to Iraq and that the operation could eventually see up to 7,000 detainees moved out of Syria.

It cited concerns over security at the prisons, which also hold thousands more women and children with ties to the militant group, after military setbacks suffered by the SDF.

A US official said that about 200 low-level IS fighters escaped from Syria's Shaddadi prison, although Syrian government forces had recaptured many of them.

Iraqi officials said Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani mentioned the transfer of IS prisoners to Iraq in a phone call with Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa on Tuesday, adding that the transfers went ahead following a formal request by the Iraqi government to Syrian authorities.

Iraqi government spokesperson Basim al-Awadi said the transfer was "a pre-emptive step to protect Iraq's national security", adding that Baghdad could not delay action given the rapid pace of security and political developments in Syria.

The Sunni group emerged in Iraq and Syria, and at the height of its power from 2014-2017 held swathes of the two countries, ruling over millions of people. Its "caliphate" eventually collapsed after a military campaign by a US-led coalition.

An Iraqi military spokesperson confirmed that Iraq had received a first batch of 150 IS detainees, including Iraqis and foreigners, and said the number of future transfers would depend on security and field assessments. The spokesperson described the detainees as senior figures within the group.

In a statement, the Supreme Judicial Council said Iraqi courts would take "due legal measures" against the detainees once they are handed over and placed in specialised correctional facilities, citing the Iraqi constitution and criminal laws.

Relatives worried

"All suspects, regardless of their nationalities or positions within the terrorist organisation, are subject exclusively to the authority of the Iraqi judiciary," the statement said.

Iraqi officials say under the legal measures, IS detainees will be separated, with senior figures including foreign nationals to be held at a high-security detention facility near Baghdad airport that was previously used by US forces.

The transfers have raised concerns among some relatives of IS detainees in Europe. A European woman whose relative joined the group and was detained in Syria said her family was alarmed by reports that prisoners were being moved to Iraq.

She said the family initially hoped changes in control in Syria might bring information on her relatives fate. "At least we thought we might finally learn where he is, whether he is alive or sick," she said.

"But when we saw that the prisoners were being taken to Iraq, that frightened us," she added, citing Iraqs use of the death penalty. Two Iraqi legal sources said the IS detainees sent from Syria include a mix of nationalities, with Iraqis making up the largest group, alongside Arab fighters from other countries as well as European and other Western nationals.

The sources said the detainees include nationals of Britain, Germany, France, Belgium and Sweden, and other European Union countries, and will be prosecuted under Iraqi jurisdiction. —Reuters

Sinners breaks all-time Oscars record with 16 nominations

LOS ANGELES: Vampire period horror film *Sinners* smashed the all-time Oscars record with 16 nominations, the Academy announced on Thursday.

The blues-inflected drama set in the 1930s segregated US South from director Ryan Coogler scored nominations in nearly every category possible, including best picture.

It blasted past the previous record of 14, jointly held by *All About Eve*, *Titanic* and *La La Land*. The tally included a best actor nomination for Michael B. Jordan, who plays twins battling supernatural forces and racists, plus everything from screenplay to score.

Sinners also picked up a nomination for best casting, the first new category to be added to Hollywood's most prestigious awards in more than two decades. *One Battle After Another* came in second place with 13 nods including best picture, best actor for Leonardo DiCaprio and best director for Paul Thomas Anderson.

But its female lead, 25-year-old newcomer Chase Infiniti, was surprisingly snubbed by Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences voters. Both of the top two nomination getters came from Warner Bros, the movie studio that is currently the target of a bidding war between Netflix and Paramount.

Guillermo del Toro's monster epic *Frankenstein*, Timothee Chalamet's ping-pong drama *Marty Supreme* and Norwegian arthouse favorite *Sentimental Value* each bagged nine nominations.

Hamnet, a period drama in which William Shakespeare and his wife struggle to cope with the loss of their son in plague-ravaged Elizabethan England, secured eight.

Jessie Buckley was nominated for playing the Bard's long-suffering wife Agnes, though the film's male lead Paul Mescal missed out.—AFP

5-year-old among four kids detained in Minnesota crackdown

WASHINGTON: US immigration authorities detained at least four children including a 5-year-old from a Minneapolis-area school district this month, school district officials said on Thursday.

The report comes amid concerns over the scope and tactics of federal law enforcement officers as part of US President Donald Trump's immigration crackdown, which has seen 3,000 officers deployed to Minnesota's largest city. Trump has described the crackdown as a battle to get violent criminals out of the US "Why detain a 5-year-old?" Zena Stenvik, the Columbia Heights Public Schools district superintendent, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

"You cannot tell me that this child is going to be classified as a violent criminal." Department of Homeland Security spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin on Thursday denied a child was targeted. ICE did NOT target a child," she said in a statement. Immigration and Customs Enforcement conducted an operation on Tuesday to arrest Adrian Alexander Conejo Arias, who was in the country illegally, she said. As agents approached, Conejo Arias fled the scene, leaving his child behind, she said.

"For the child's safety, one of our ICE officers remained with the child while the other officers apprehended Conejo Arias," McLaughlin said in a statement. She said parents targeted in ICE operations are asked if they want to be removed with their children or have them placed with a person designated by the parents. DHS did not comment on the school district's assertion that other children have also been detained by ICE.

At the news conference, Stenvik said Liam Conejo Ramos, 5, was taken with his father in their driveway after having been picked up from preschool on Tuesday. The same day, she said, a 17-year-old high school student was taken by armed and masked agents while on the way to school. No parents were present at the time, she said. Two weeks ago, a 10-year-old was taken by ICE agents on her way to elementary school and she and her mother are still in a Texas detention center, Stenvik said.—Reuters

SECURITY personnel stand next to a five-year-old boy who was detained in Minneapolis.—Reuters

Former counsel tells Congress Trump 'wilfully' broke laws

US president calls Jack Smith 'deranged animal'

WASHINGTON: Former US Special Counsel Jack Smith, who unsuccessfully prosecuted President Donald Trump, told a House of Representatives panel on Thursday that Trump was "looking for ways to stay in power" following his defeat in the 2020 election as he confronted Republican criticisms of his investigation.

Smith was fielding questions before the Republican-controlled House Judiciary Committee about his two criminal cases, which he dropped after Trump won the 2024 presidential election.

One case accused Trump of conspiring to overturn his defeat in the 2020 election, while the other accused him of unlawfully holding onto classified documents. The hearing marks the first time the American public will hear at length from Smith, whose historic prosecutions dominated Trump's years out of power and helped fuel the Republican president's quest for retribution since returning to office.

"President Trump was charged because the evidence established that he willfully broke the very laws that he took an oath to uphold," Smith told the House panel. "If asked whether to prosecute a former president based on the same facts today, I would do so, regardless of whether that president was a Democrat or a Republican."

'Deranged animal'

US President Donald Trump on Thursday blasted former special counsel Jack Smith as a "deranged animal" and urged a Justice Department investigation, as the former prosecutor testified before Congress.

Smith "is a deranged animal, who shouldn't be allowed to practice Law," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform.

"Hopefully the Attorney General is looking at what he's done, including some of the crooked and corrupt witnesses that he was attempting to use in his case against me," the president added.

Republicans allege bias

Republican lawmakers sought to discredit Smith's investigation and buttress Trump's claims that the probes were an abuse of the legal system. Republicans focused particular attention on Smith's decision to seek limited phone records from former House Speaker Mike Johnson and several Republican senators, along with court orders that barred lawmakers from being notified of the subpoenas.

Trump allies have argued that the records show Smiths investigation was overzealous and aimed at the political opposition. "It was always about politics," Representative Jim Jordan of Ohio, the Republican chair of the Judiciary Committee, said at the start of the hearing. "To get Donald Trump, they were willing to do just about anything." Smith said the records were necessary to examine Trumps efforts to pressure Republican lawmakers to block certification of the election.

He said he had "grave concerns about obstruction of justice in this investigation, specifically with regards to Donald Trump." Smiths testimony focused primarily on the case that accused Trump of using false voter fraud claims to obstruct the certification of election results following his 2020 defeat to Democrat Joe Biden.

He told lawmakers that Republican witnesses, especially those who informed Trump that his fraud claims were not true, would have formed the core of the case had it gone to trial. "Our investigation revealed that Donald Trump was not looking for honest answers about whether there was fraud in the election," Smith said. "He was looking for ways to stay in power."

A federal judge has barred the Justice Department from disclosing many of the details surrounding Smiths second case, which accused Trump of stashing highly sensitive government documents at his Mara-Lago residence following the end of his first term in 2021.

Trump pleaded not guilty to all charges and has repeatedly argued the charges were improperly aimed at damaging his 2024 campaign. Neither case reached trial and Smith dropped them after Trump won re-election, citing a Justice Department policy against prosecuting a sitting president.—Agencies

Trump to sue *NYT* over unfavourable poll

WASHINGTON: US President Donald Trump announced on Thursday he will sue *The New York Times* over an unfavorable opinion poll and suggested that what he called "fake" surveys should criminalised.

Trump lashed out after publication of a New York Times/Siena University poll finding only 40 per cent approval for the 79-year-old Republican — in line with multiple other polls showing declining support a year into his second term.

"The Times Siena Poll...will be added to my lawsuit against The Failing New York Times," Trump said on his Truth Social platform. "They will be held fully responsible for all of their Radical Left lies and wrongdoing!" Expanding on the threat, Trump posted that "Fake and Fraudulent Polling should be, virtually, a criminal offense." Trump has fired off multiple defamation lawsuits against media companies, including the *BBC, CNN, Wall Street Journal, CBS* and *ABC*. Some have ended in multi-million-dollar settlements.

He first filed a $15 billion defamation suit against the *Times* in September 2025, claiming the leading US newspaper had run false stories to hurt his 2024 presidential campaign and reputation.—AFP

Czech PM ridiculed after buying globe to 'find Greenland'

PRAGUE: Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babis has become the butt of jokes on social media after buying an expensive globe to "find Greenland".

The autonomous territory of Denmark has hit the headlines because US President Donald Trump has threatened to seize control of it.

Trump's ambition has rocked Nato and spelt trouble for Babis, a self-declared "Trumpist", who spent hundreds of dollars on a globe and posted to social media about it. Jokes were quick to flood the web, one user posting a mocked-up news article claiming scammers had sold an expensive globe to "a gullible pensioner".

An X user named "BezeLzi" ("NoLies ") said Babis should also look up Ukraine so he could "learn how close the war is", after he had rejected military aid to Kyiv battling a Russian invasion since 2022.

The 71-year-old tycoon leads a three-party coalition government including eurosceptics and far-right politicians.

Babis has insisted on steering foreign policy since taking office last December, but he has stumbled on the world's largest island.

"I have bought this globe for 15,000 koruna ($720), a lovely, large one, to see exactly where this Greenland is," Babis told reporters on Monday when asked about his government's policy on the US-Denmark rift. Standard globes typically sell for up to 1,000 koruna.

On Tuesday, Babis went a step further in a Facebook video where he complained that conventional maps skewed geographical facts.

"On this beautiful globe, you can see the real size of Greenland against the United States and Europe," he said. —AFP

Pakistan signs up for 'Board of Peace'

Continued from Page 1

reconstruction. The presentation included maps of new settlements in the Gaza Strip and artist renderings of gleaming seafront hotels and apartments.

With a slide showing dozens of shiny terraced apartments overlooking a tree-lined promenade, he promised a Mediterranean utopia rising from the Gaza landscape.

"It could be a hope. It could be a destination," Kushner said.

Earlier in the conflict, Trump had floated his vision of turning Gaza into a "Riviera of the Middle East", sparking outrage around the world.

Kushner said the next phase of the Gaza ceasefire deal would address funding for reconstruction as well as disarmament by Hamas. "If Hamas doesn't demilitarise, that would be what holds this plan back," Kushner said.

"The next 100 days, we're going to continue to just be heads down and focused on making sure this is implemented. We continue to be focused on humanitarian aid and humanitarian shelter."

Focus right now on Gaza

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff also spoke on the occasion.

In his speech, Rubio highlighted that Trump was "willing to talk to or engage with anyone in the interest of peace".

Marco Rubio stressed: "Now we have this Board of Peace … [its] possibilities are endless. Obviously, with a focus first and foremost on making sure this peace deal in Gaza becomes enduring.

"I know this president has it as his highest priority and will give everything that he has to make sure that this is successful."

The US secretary of state asserted: "This is not just a Board of Peace but a board of action, just like President Trump is a president of action."

The secretary of state emphasised that the "focus is right now on Gaza and making sure that the […] vision for the future of Gaza […] of the region, is not just possible and promising, but it is our destiny".

He further said it would serve as an example of "what's possible for other places and other conflicts that seem impossible to solve right now".

"Many others who are going to join … are not in town today or they have to go through some procedure internally in their own country because of constitutional limitations, but others will join," Marco Rubio added. —Agencies

French navy boards tanker 'from Russia' in Mediterranean

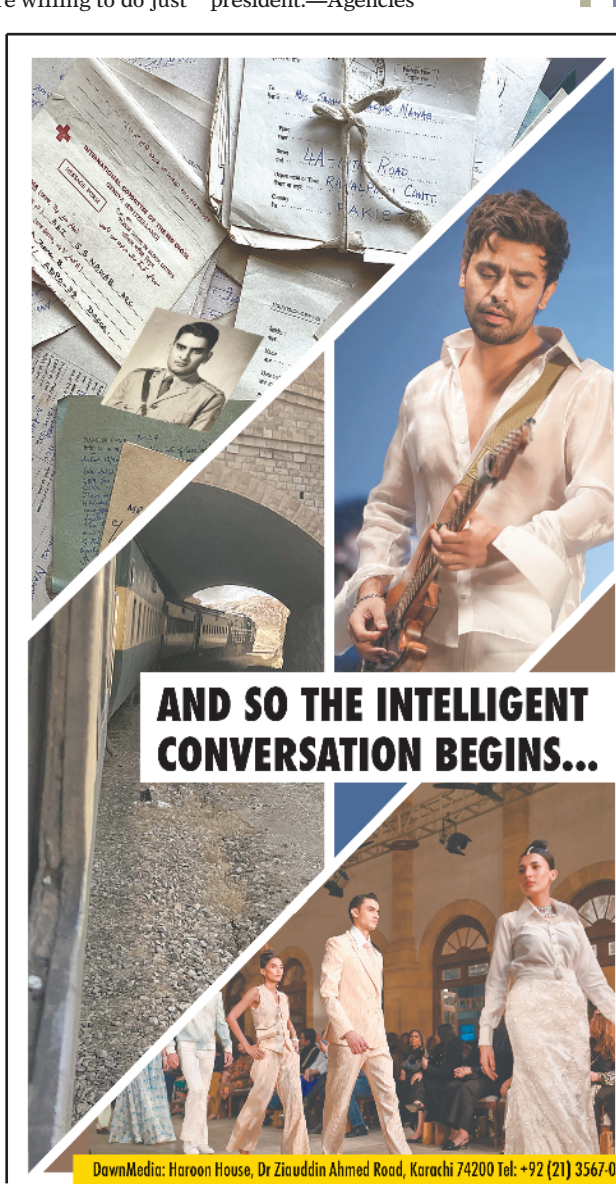
PARIS: France's navy, with the help of allies, on Thursday boarded a tanker alleged to be from Russia's sanction-busting "shadow fleet" in the Mediterranean, President Emmanuel Macron said.

"This morning, the French Navy boarded an oil tanker coming from Russia, subject to international sanctions and suspected of flying a false flag," he said on X in English, adding the operation had been carried out "with the support of several of our allies".

Local maritime authorities said the navy seized an oil tanker called "Grinch" between Spain and Morocco, after it started its journey in the Russian Arctic port of Murmansk.

A ship called "Grinch" is under UK sanctions, while another called "Carl" with the same registration number is sanctioned by the United States and European Union. Ship tracking websites marinetraffic and vesselfinder said the vessel had been flying a Comoros flag.

"After the team boarded, an examination of documents confirmed the doubts as to the regularity of the flag," the Mediterranean Maritime Prefecture said. The ship "is currently being escorted by the national navy to a point of anchorage for further verifications," it added. Images released by the French military showed masked soldiers boarding the Russia-linked ship in an operation involving a navy boat and two navy helicopters.—AFP



THIS SUNDAY'S HIGHLIGHTS:

EOS

PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIETY. CULTURE. IDEAS.

COVER: MISSIVES FROM A PRISONER OF WAR
From 1971 to 1974, Saiyid Safdar Nawab wrote more than 150 letters to his family in Pakistan while he was held in India as a prisoner of war (POW) after the 1971 Indo-Pak war. The letters, discovered upon his death in December, present a poignant portrait of what it was like to live in POW camps for three years, separated from his family and his life back home, and the agonising wait for a return...

SECURITY: ON THE JAFFAR EXPRESS
After the deadly hijacking last year, the train from Quetta to Sindh, Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa now moves under intense security. A first-hand account shows how violence has reshaped rail travel across Balochistan

ENVIRONMENT: THARPARKAR'S POISONOUS INVASION
Instead of saving degraded land, the imported *devi* plant is now sucking ancient wells dry, poisoning animals and strangling the desert vegetation that communities have depended on for generations

BOOKS&AUTHORS: Tauseef Ahmed Khan and Irfan Aziz's *Insani Huqooq Ka Irtiqa Aur Tasawwur*, Imran Sheikh's *Jus' Gistin'*, and Peerzada Salman's *Fever Log and Other Stories*; ALSO: Claire Chambers on Daniyal Mueenuddin's *This Is Where the Serpent Lives*

PLUS: Nadeem F. Paracha on Beyond the Confines of Ideology, Farid Alvie's Cliftonia, Islamabad's The Black Hole, PSL'S Brand New Era, Salima Hashmi's Open Studio in Lahore, Laila Rahman's 'Witness', Dr Khwaja Ali Shahid's Gardening, Auntie Agni and Static Cling

ICON

INSIGHT INTO ENTERTAINMENT. PERFORMING ARTS. STYLE. CELEBRITY.

THE ICON INTERVIEW: FARHAN SAEED
He's been a singer for two decades but is only now coming out with his first solo album. He's been acting in globally popular TV dramas and films for more than a decade, but admits he can't tell which project will be a hit. And he says he enjoys being creative – but then, why does he always want to get home as soon as possible?

STYLE: SPACE, STORY AND CRAFT
Parishae Adnan's *Darbar* show held at the colonial Khaliqdina Hall marked a shift in how her design house thinks about fashion as a business

PLUS: Review of Netflix's *The Rip*, *How Stranger Things* Can Be Used to Help Young People's Mental Health, Valentino the 'Quintessentially Beautiful' Designer, The Grapevine, The Tube and Spotify's Top Pakistani Music

DAWN

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